

FEAR AND LEARNING IN A NUCLEAR CRISIS:

A Psychological Study of the Resolution and Implications
of the Cuban Missile Crisis

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He who is educated by dread is educated by possibility...when such a person, therefore, goes out from the school of possibility, and knows...that terror, perdition and annihilation dwell next door to every man, and has learned the profitable lesson that every dread which alarms may the next instant become a fact, he will then interpret reality differently.

Søren Kierkegaard, The
Concept of Dread, 1844

(ignoring JFK ultimatum, and his refusal to back down!)
Emphasis on (JFK's) ultimatum, "stop," action to avoid war
19, 22, 24, 32 43, 44, 48, 62 : 153 129 (130) (133) 135 (139)

K's plan: 262

Nuclear "insurrection":

through US FU ? 30
("NATO")

explicitly described: 34

alleged NFO commitment: "The war must never be fought"
70-78

DePue's, say, 1973:
167

*Fear of imminent nuclear war is not new.
fear of human irrationality, or one's own
loss of control. ("Responsible, ~~unreliable~~ based from,
reflects power, wanting (not me.
"war") is enough. Leadership may be*

-80-

is not an exaggeration to speak of the nuclear revolution...
[because] the side that is ahead is no more protected than the
side that is behind."⁸ Leaders of the superpowers know
already, and in a nuclear crisis will (and have) come to know in
a profoundly visceral way that they cannot defend themselves or
their citizens from nuclear catastrophe. Under normal
circumstances, this is not necessarily an item of breathless
concern, primarily because of the nearly ubiquitous faith that
leaders are rational and that they will not, therefore, initiate
a process leading to national suicide by launching off into a
nuclear war. But as fear of inadvertence begins to rear its
enigmatical head, and as leaders begin to believe that
rationality alone may not prevent nuclear war, the fact of
vulnerability to holocaust takes on newly sinister meaning.

Second, there is the related fear of the momentum of the
crisis itself - fear that in some darkly mysterious way, the
crisis will cause one or more of the central actors to
de-emphasize, or even momentarily to forget about their
vulnerability and thus to initiate a nuclear war. Schelling
believes that these worries can lead to great danger. "Nothing
is more dangerous to either side in a nuclear confrontation," he
writes, "than the anxiety on the other side, the reciprocated
anxiety about the breakdown of confidence in the ability to keep
the crisis from exploding into war."⁹ Schelling has long
believed that some such process of mutually escalating anxiety
in a nuclear crisis greatly increases the risk of a preemptive

*misleadingly,
Assessment of
D-L-
or of literal
nuclear war.*

but, D-2

*NO "
(D-2)*

see Treya Wilbur on ascription of control
control over career — on fear of lack
of control — cf. my feeling of (seminar)
guilt — rather than feel, "catastrophe
is unforeseeable, uninfluenceable..."

(and see "The idea of justice" — people
would rather believe the world than
believe life is meaningless.

Perhaps, rather die a nice death (Brecht)
to assume a meaningful life and death.

faced. Beginning on October 16 from, as McGeorge Bundy has said, a "standing start" the men in the EXCOMM underwent a rapid and tumultuous barrage of unexpected and deeply troubling events and fears of even worse occurrences. That they have been unable satisfactorily to integrate their evolving psychological reality into a plausible account of the crisis is no surprise. But what is more than a little surprising, I think, is that in a matter of a few days these men - and Khrushchev certainly must be included in this category - were able to respond so creatively and adaptively* to a set of fears they never expected to have and which, I think it is quite clear, they still do not fully understand. They had the wisdom and courage to forsake their preconceived ideas about how to manage a nuclear crisis in practice, even though their various retrospective theories about the effects of those actions remain pretty unconvincing, simply because they omit the very core of the psychological reality they faced: Fear of inadvertent nuclear war. And it was (and is) vastly more important for the peace of the world that these men in fact "had the experience," to re-invoke yet again George Ball's favorite passage from Eliot, than that they may have "missed the meaning." The meaning is for all of us to puzzle out.

But while it is true that the analogy between scientific crises and a nuclear crisis may shed some light on the cognitive side of evolving psychological life during the missile crisis, it does not, I think, even begin to allow us to appreciate the

(1)

NO

NO: K
(on Castro
on JFK
courage
- Cuba)

{

he thought
Pres was a
coward!

"They look good only because K was 'creative and adaptive' (if you discount his belief (DE!): We had to back down." But for him to think, JFK wasn't under an ultimatum; and didn't want to win" did not mean

See Hilpert to me on plans (No need to
change them, fight JCS, in advance).

Suppose, ult. without (Castro) U-2 shot down.
What would K have done?
What did RFK expect?

(He didn't admit Real story; but I know
how close they were to going up wires. Would it
have been like JFK "plan" or not hitting ground troops
in VN? (RFK 67)

New Pres feels challenged to try the next
ring of the ladder (JCS options list) before
accepting shameful compromise.

Like, Sunday: need to use wires, before compromising;
or, hitting Hanoi, mining Haiphong;
or invading with troops (1965-67)

(mining Haiphong; see that
on Hwe 71)
HAK
Like N in 1969, and 1972 (I suspect)

Even he could not, even, concede;
or

He had to "fly forward," into threat, before
conceding/compromising [going up invasion? still a threat?]

(Note: "in law," Cuba/SU had a legal
right to shoot down U-2; US had none,
to 1) blockade 2) destroy missiles (see Turkey!)
3) invade.

misunderstanding

Was there a consensus — a common assumption — of
the "fact" (prior to RFK ult) that US
would ("have to") attack on Monday if
missiles were not removed? B means as if...

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direct

plausibly to account for this development, this learning, in my view, without accepting as basic three propositions which are antithetical to the whole tradition of nuclear strategy and policy and of the interpretation of the missile crisis: First, that the missile crisis is not "like" any other international crisis; though it has psychological analogues in other sorts of crises, second, that Robert Kennedy did indeed deliver a "statement of fact" to the Soviets on the evening of October 27, 1962, a statement behind which lay a week of the most profound confusion and fear of inadvertent nuclear war; and third, that the uniqueness and inscrutability of the psychological transformations which occurred during the missile crisis make it more, rather than less, interesting as an object of still further study and learning about how best to avoid nuclear war. In that pivotal crisis, the participants were able somehow to connect their fear with their actions in adaptive ways. They had that experience. But neither they, nor we, have yet found a way to connect them in theory in a way that integrates their practice into our formal thinking about avoiding nuclear war. We are still searching for the meaning. Some preliminary steps are taken in the chapters which follow to articulate the general direction some such search ought to follow.

NO

yes

B argues as if the crisis had been resolved
by JFK's rejection of K offer ("U Thant offer")
on Sunday, after (backing down from) but with
(and rejection of K offer, publicly and privately)
or instead of making it. 27th and next day.
(as, Saturday). He rejects the K offer with RFK with;
(DENIAL)
"statement"

Is "Drill" a (total) bluff?
Is "that that means something
to them" (not total control)
a bluff?

Do not mean all "bluffs" have
something of above elements?

(then involving risks -
of conviction / perhaps / power
of change - myself;
"loss of control control"

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in
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var
a r
sel
the
phe
ide
rec
amor
much
beli
miss
and
fear
chara
conve
inadv

missile crisis and his unequivocal endorsement of crisis management, fear is bad, is maladaptive and can only lead to bad management. In a nuclear crisis, this of course means that increased fear will lead ^{always not} straightaway to an increased likelihood of nuclear holocaust. But because fear is so widely believed to be maladaptive by participants in the missile crisis and analysts alike, anyone arguing for the adaptive importance of fear will appear to be up to his neck in a nonsequiter.

The problem, here as elsewhere in the study of a nuclear crisis, is this: Participants and analysts alike have for various reasons failed to appreciate the vast difference between a rational reconstruction, derived by looking backward at a selected, distorted, perhaps coherent set of mental snapshots of the past on the one hand and, on the other, the uncertain phenomenology of living the event forward without the slightest idea of how it will turn out. What this tilting toward rational reconstruction sums to is the widespread inability, I believe, among all manner of students of the missile crisis, and of so much nuclear policy-making which rests on its interpretation, to believe that fear was thick in the psychological texture of the missile crisis and, even more importantly, that this fear was and remains unprecedented. It was a profound fear, and that fear was ^{only} not fear of calculated attack, as one characteristically finds at the psychological root of conventional deterrence failures, but was rather fear of inadvertence - of fate, if you will. I believe that if we try

OK - led
to ult. ~~shift~~
(rather than
"drift":
or immediate
conversion)

visibly "loss of oneself, and self-control, and self-possession"
(Kaiser), of "disgrace" (Faron, Denning), and role/job/control of
subordinates,

20/1/68
b) control

will by then have been exhausted, confused and frightened by their recursive participation in a mind-game described many years ago by Schelling: "He thinks we think he thinks we think...he thinks we think he'll attack; so he thinks we shall; so he will; so we must."⁸ By some such psychological process as this, leaders will have initiated the nuclear war that, at the outset of the crisis, all sought to avoid unequivocally. And at the psychological fountainhead of this process will have been fear, leading to stress and its associated psychopathologies, which will together have been responsible for transforming leaders' beliefs from total opposition to initiating nuclear war to go ahead and authorize nuclear first use, either in a preemptive strike or in some more initially limited escalatory action.

This is the central prognostication and concern of proponents of the rational/irrational actor psychologies which presently circumscribe discussion of nuclear policy. We should note two of its characteristics: First, while nuclear war would be arrived at inadvertently, in the sense that the decision to end the crisis by launching nuclear weapons was not anticipated at the time of entry into the crisis, the object of the fear which drives the hypothesized psychopathologies has nothing to do with inadvertence itself, but is instead simply fear of being attacked. In other words, according to this view, leaders in a nuclear crisis will, in all probability, not learn anything significant as they try to manage it. It will seem to them, as

but, along with
the goals
(also
"absolute",
meaning
to the point
of "accepting
a (higher)
risk of
TN war..."
(then, with
horror, seeing
a high risk
- reducible
by "summing"
- which may
or may not
still be
unacceptable
- in which
case,
protection
may be
impossible
to wait
and b) perhaps
being
stuck

I learned from VN (and from studies
Cuba II letter) not from crisis,
(except, of distant leaders; first, for giving in to the, for not / 1962)

20, strong
later.
for not / 1962

expulsion, loss of role/status/job/home/
identity/dignity, integration of org/other
disobedience, dishonor,
(betrayal)

and "being struck"

esp. fear of failure, defeat, humiliation, =
summing "fear of nuc war: as if
we strike first"

Choice of Fear
Choice of Lesser Fear

(Choice of Greater Evil
- or high risk of Greater Evil -
to avoid Greater Fear
Greater Humiliation
" loss (separation
" mutilation (torture
" " worse" "disfigurements")

(There are separations "losses",
the physical death / annihilation;
sufferings worse than sins / murders.

see Omin
"death-row"

"We have ways of making you...
talk;
more than talk!"

But of course that would mean outright war with the Soviet Union. It may have been in the course of some such reflection as this that Robert Kennedy began to wonder "what, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"¹⁸

Here we come to the heart of the psychological matter, viewed from a phenomenological perspective, from the standpoint of individuals who were groping forward into an unknown and dangerous future: The Crystal Ball Effect. It is here that we may see the deep wisdom of Schelling's neglected insight based on his reading of the events in October, 1962 - that in the missile crisis, the enemy shifted from the nuclear adversary to the nuclear "environment." Feared nuclear inadvertence was in that instance the fear of a process and an outcome that is abhorred by both sides, thus creating a de facto but powerful common enemy against which both sides must unite if they are to keep the nuclear crystal ball from shattering. One psychological result of this process seems to be the turning outward onto the whole environment of potentially dangerous events, rather than a turning inward in defensive avoidance as the psychological domino theory of rational/irrational actors predicts. Instead of becoming less sensitive to the perceptions and needs of the adversary, leaders in October, 1962 seem to have obsessed with how their actions would be perceived by the

JFK: "but not yet. First, unite on my terms."
Admiral, K on that morning
(i.e. late Friday night, Moscow time)
(while we were reading his "Foreigner" letter, he (v. others) was drafting his "let moving" letter, sent late Friday night his time: before learning of attack on SAM sites, Fri night. It is 10:00 late night when he learns of shooting; only moving when he gets ult.; sends order about 11:00 PM. - then) Sunday...

What did banks think of
risk of bourgeois etc? ("O": Perry)
and if it occurred?

But fear was not necessary to
JFK's ultimatum (unless, it was
for JFK!) - on the terms he offered.

It could ("should," according
to banks, and most "rational vector
analysts") have come from courage,
or from "calm appraisal of
balance of forces." Or as it did: from a
"combination of fear and fear-of-failure, stubbornness, denial, etc."
Killer for K, if he was
a "calm rational vector"; but been
hulped, and may (being) have
been necessary.

i.e. bureaucratically,
giving "normal
modernity"

(JFK allowed "normal modernity"
to outweigh his "~~scare~~
some fear + whimsies"
on lat. night - therefore won.

What makes K indecipherable puzzling + prohibitive
to doers (it is not, for banks!)

- 1) John ^{unusual} beliefs in effective significance: 1940.
- 2) His "toughness" till then. ("admirable," "normal," ^{prediction} _{Colson})
- 3) Why didn't back down - drinking then from;
he won't a command; why did he?
- 4) John belief in SU¹ control (of SAMs),
AA (?) + mines; so why the need (he had 43 hours; could
have "used" all day Sunday...)
(Why did he seem so soon? - children

Reading built
to think and to
"offer."

John's stupid, according to
banks doers, and to rat. vector
analysts (w/ SU doers).
SU would not have
backed down - as soon -
K's position (contingent to
rat. vector suppression
K "normal rat." behavior!)
this own!

— Does B think it inevitable, certain, that
K would back down? see 235

— Does he think RFK's ult. added nothing
to the prob/risk that US could strike
(by Monday!) if K did not desist in the minutes?
("statement of fact" = i.e. (that) did not change situation, US prob.
expression of it being clarified or confirmed it for

(was mistake planned for late Monday
(48 hrs) — unlikely — or for first light
Tuesday?

When operational?

Otherwise, he should recognize (not "deny")
that JFK's implicit response to been was
to increase conditional prob of US strike (= war)
if K did not move within 24⁴⁸ hours
(which JFK did not, much, expect!)

RFK did not say: "We can (probably) not
hold back JCS more than 48 hrs, although
we will try ~~to~~ on hardest."

Nor did he believe (what he said) that
there could not be a deal along the lines of
a public truce.

(Wf is ref. to a comp deleted?!

B says to think ~~over~~ JFK + K
acted symmetrically - both made
(equal) concessions.

Why didn't K answer (as as to
get public track, what he'd asked)
with his "Statement of Facts" of what
would follow US air-strike, or invasion?

Why not the "Kerry" of after crisis?

←

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cat

did
the
ever
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could
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